

20 March: The International Day of Happiness



By Acharya Bramdeo

Celebrated for the first time in 2013, the International Day of Happiness was proclaimed by the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, vide- Resolution 66/281 of July 12, 2012. The resolution was initiated by Bhutan, the first country in our modern world to recognize the Value of National Happiness over national income since the early 1970s and to set the Gross National Happiness as a priority goal over the Gross National Product for the sustainable wellbeing of its population. Bhutan also hosted a High Level Meeting on "Happiness and Well-Being: Defining a New Economic Paradigm" during that assembly

Why so much unhappiness around us? The absence of morals is the root of evils. Ethics, through all dealings, will ensure social progress and a society free from unlimited desires where all endeavours have a common denominator: the continuous uplift of physical, spiritual and social standards of all.

Unhappiness is also a direct result of our ultra-modern definition of holistic with narrowed-down meanings, which in fact refers to all-inclusive systems (physical, biological, chemical, social, economic, mental, linguistic, etc.) where the individualities or features are to be viewed as wholes, not just as a collection of parts.

The Happiness Index is no new term. In fact the hymns of chapter 36 of the YajurVeda advocate peace, progress and prosperity in terms of the uplift of the physical, spiritual and social welfare of all, a unique approach which cuts across various religions and cultures of the world, which is today reckoned as the Gross Happiness Index.

GDP versus Gross Happiness Index: Today's turmoil hitting people, societies, nations and the world is due to the fact that progress is simply equated to growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Calculated on consumption, GDP is fast leading to the depletion of world resources and the degradation of the environment

09 May 2016, SIDS Conference in Mauritius: Ban Ki Moon, the then UN Secretary General stated during the: "We will need high-level, high-energy political commitment, renewed global partnership for development ...to go beyond traditional statistics and embrace a data revolution ...to prioritize social goals and the integrity of the planet and transform our economy ... to look beyond national borders and short-term interests and act in solidarity ...institutions must adapt and become fit for an even bigger purpose ...*But this agenda will not be realized in New York or Geneva ...It will happen in communities and it will take everyone* ...Sustainability is development that respects people and the planet and requires us to make the linkages between climate change, energy,

food security, water scarcity, global health and decent work ...we must move from aspirations to action – from intentions to implementation.”

The UN Chief went another step further in his meeting with the private sector people: « It seems people believe they have two planets. The mind-set has to change. »

In his own way, he espoused the universal concepts which caution us that each and every one need be ever aware that our universe has sufficient resources to fulfil the needs of all NOT the greed of a few! (*aparigraha*, i.e. to stay away from greediness).

Focus on well-being and happiness: Decision makers (from the households to national and international levels) need to be true to social goals, to the integrity of our planet, to look beyond national borders and short-term interests, to act in solidarity and institutions must adapt and become fit for an even bigger purpose. We need to review past strategies, namely – a holistic approach to education from kindergartens to universities.

Misunderstanding secularism: In the name of secularism all moral stories (Hitopdesha, Panchatantra, Maupassant, Victor Hugo, & others) have been simply deleted from school books across the world, and subjects like literature, history, etc. devalued. Thus, began the decline of humanity among mankind, the decline of mutual support, the surge of inconsistent behaviour and duplicity leading to various scams and world economic crashes.

A holistic approach to education for the overall increase in well-being and happiness: Holistic education is defined as a philosophy of education based on the premise that each person finds identity, **meaning**, and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to humanitarian values. To achieve that, Sage Manu’s ten tenets of Dharma (virtue) and Sage Patanjali’s Yama – Niyama constitute a really secular universal code of ethics that should be integrated in teaching curriculum at all levels. Each country and/or region has just to fit in the local stories of their cultural heritage to bring forth those values (patience; compassion; endurance/resilience; non-violence; non-stealing; purity in terms of sound mind, body & spirit; self-control; truth ...etc.)

Realising the purpose of the International Day of Happiness

Then only we shall give due recognition to the pursuit of happiness and well-being as a fundamental human goal and solve longstanding questionable issues such as-

- the exclusive pursuit of economic growth in terms of Gross Domestic Product and high income economies as the key objectives of development;
- the assessment of a country’s development solely on income levels, and ignoring other determinants such as lack of access to basic services, discrimination or social exclusion;
- the undervaluing of the divergence between economic and social policies, and the disregard of the social impact of economic policies;
- the insufficient attention paid to the design of indicators of both sustainable development and well-being.

Humane & holistic approach: The happiness and well-being of people is only-and-only through a more inclusive, equitable and balanced approach to economic growth that promotes sustainable development, poverty eradication, happiness and the well-being of all peoples.

The benchmark to measure the success rate: Realising the objectives is, nothing but only the sum total of the individual efforts of each and every one to live up to the universal ideals or living values. *Pointing one finger at the other person equals to three fingers pointing towards our own self!* The world will experience increased happiness only by the transformation of each and every single person as the individual is the smallest unit of society: the individual as a role model for his family and friends; the family as a role model for the community, village, town; the town as a role model for the country; and the country as a role model for the world.

The universal prayer from the Brihādaranyak Upanishad ticks the mind towards a holistic approach to happiness:

OM sarve bhavantu sukhinah sarve santu nirāmaya |

Sarve bhadrāni pashyantu mā kaschiddukha bhaga bhavet ||

O Lord !

May all be happy (Peace be unto all);

May all be disease free (Good health be unto all);

May all strive for universal welfare (Goodness be in our thoughts, speech & actions);

May all be free from pains & sorrows (Goodness be in our character, actions & innate nature).

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